*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde

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Pages 165 – 210

**Summary**

After murdering Basil, Dorian attends a dinner party that he feels is boring, until the arrival of Lord Henry. Dorian begins having trouble eating, and Henry asks him later what was going on and where he had been the previous evening. In response, Dorian snaps a defensive answer and hurries home to burn all of Basil’s possessions. Afterward, Dorian retrieves a canister of opium and requests a coach to take him to the opium dens in the poorer areas of London. He meets with Adrian Singleton, whom he had supposedly corrupted. While there, women begin to refer to him as “Prince Charming,” causing a strange man to follow Dorian out to the street as he leaves. In a flash, the man has Dorian at gunpoint. The man is James Vane, Sybil’s brother, who professes that he had been tracking Dorian for years in order to avenge his sister’s death. Dorian argues that with the face of a twenty year old (the time it had been since he loved Sybil), he could not possibly be the man who wronged her. James releases him and returns to the opium den only to be informed that it was in fact Dorian, but he hadn’t aged a day in all of the years he went there. James is furious and pledges to hunt him down again. Dorian holds a dinner party at his country house a week later, where he has a wonderful time until, in horror, he believes he sees the face of James Vane in the window. After locking himself in the house for three days and becoming paranoid, Dorian takes a walk on the grounds and attends a shooting party in the park. He has a wonderful time until they hear a man screaming. They find a man dead in the bushes with a shot through his chest. Dorian expresses to Henry that it is a bad omen, but Henry brushes it off and teases Dorian about his relationship with a duchess. Dorian expresses that he is so self-absorbed he cannot love. He then demands to make provisions for the dead man’s funeral and requests to see him. The man was James Vane. Dorian cries on his way home.

**Analysis**

This part of the book was utterly confusing and shocking. First, I did not understand how Dorian’s face could have possibly been un-aged. It sounded completely unrealistic. When Dorian went to the opium dens, I was not surprised, but still disappointed. Dorian had the potential to be so much more, but instead he smoked opium and murdered the man who loved him – he is at rock bottom. I was pleased to see the appearance of James Vane at the opium dens, however. At the beginning of the book, James Vane pledged to murder Dorian if he ever hurt Sybil – almost foreshadowing that something would happen to Sybil (her suicide) and Dorian would be punished for it. I was beyond disappointed and completely shocked, however, when James Vane lost his life to the random shooting. I was rooting for James, and thus a little angry with Oscar Wilde with how he ended the book. It was ruined by the way there was no justice for Basil and no punishment for Dorian except a miserable life. Then again, I almost wonder if the lack of justice/punishment was a reflection of Oscar Wilde’s life – as Oscar Wilde was openly gay, and that was obviously not condoned in 19th century England. Oscar Wilde would be the “Basil,” for whom there was no justice (or no freedom to live as he pleased), whereas the oppressors would be the “Dorian” – ones who never received any punishment for their oppressing or wrongdoing. I really wish Oscar Wilde hadn’t ended the book as he did, but if it was meant to reflect his personal struggle, then I can accept that.

**Application**

The human trait that was most evident to me in the section was failure. Humans all fail, as it’s an inevitable part of life – but the difference between most humans and Dorian was that most people fail once and get back up to try again or fix it. Dorian failed in his self-obsession, which he knew was wrong. He failed after corrupting multiple friends and murdering Basil. He repeatedly failed, but never made corrections. What made Dorian different from the human race is that he had a missing piece, as he said to Henry, “I am unable to love,” namely because of his vanity. I don’t believe that he was truly ruined by his vanity – I think there was a part of his that made him unable to love or feel emotion, as if he had a disease or a missing wire. I do think that all humans have the capability to love, whether they know it or not – but ruthless murderers with no remorse, like Dorian, lack that capability. Dorian’s narcissism, combined with his lack of compassion, led to his repeated failure. Regardless of the fact that he was intelligent enough to recognize that missing trait, he wasn’t smart enough (or driven enough) to make the change.